



Presentation to the Driving Forum  
11 April 2023, the Netherlands

Theo Ploegmakers and Kathalijne Visser



# What is 'Social License to Operate'?



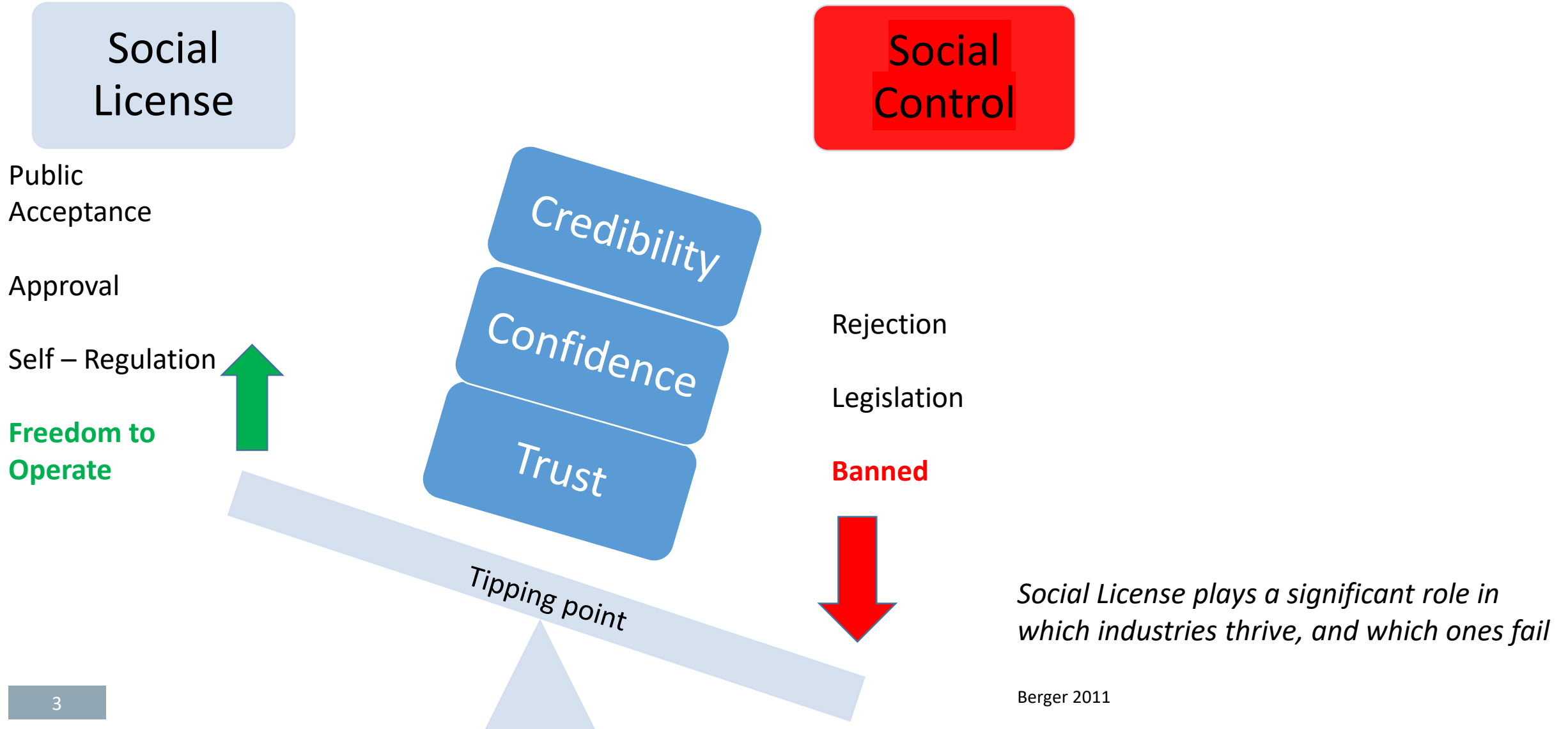
**An unwritten social contract between the public/society and an industry/organisation**

Many industries - and sports - seeking to protect and strengthen their social licence

Issues in sport include sustainability, integrity, safety, doping, etc.

Equestrian sport is unique – more vulnerable to negative public opinion - because it involves use of an animal

# How does Social License to Operate work?



# Why now? Rising concerns about use of horses in sport

Society's views on using horses in sport must be acknowledged, says charity boss

November 22, 2017 | Horsetalk.co.uk | 0 Comments



The winning amateur picture in the 2014 FEI Solidarity World Photo Grand Prix. © FEI



Journal of Veterinary Behavior

Volume 36, March–April 2020, Pages 40–47



Equine Research

An investigation into equestrian spur use in the United Kingdom

Chloe Lemon, Victoria Lewis, Lucy Dumbell, Hieke Brown

Home / News

'Outrageous' decision to allow pre-competition equine sedative



Eleanor Jones

19 September, 2022 15:53



Sports

PETA calls on IOC president to remove equestrian events from Games



Photo: Horse and Hound magazine



Opinion

**Equestrian sports have an animal cruelty problem – dressage should be banned from the Olympics**

In my experience, the most distressed horses are always those who come from the horse racing industry



PETA steps up call for equestrian events to be banned from Olympics as FEI probes German video footage

EQUESTRIAN

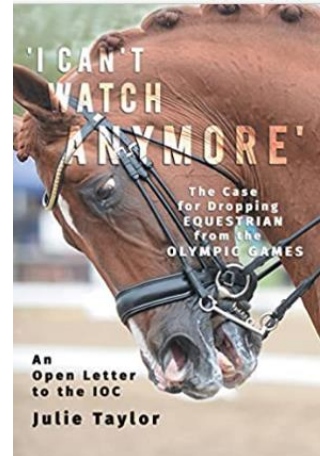
Equestrian: NZ Olympic great Sir Mark Todd apologises after social media video emerges of horse being whipped with stick

13/02/2022 | Alex Powell



New rules on horse nosebands needed to prevent distress, say researchers

Study found horses' heart rates increased and they struggled to chew when nosebands were over-tightened, leading to calls for stricter regulations on use



# Why now?

## Increase in research publications related to equine welfare

Review > [Animals \(Basel\)](#). 2022 May 5;12(9):1186. doi: 10.3390/ani12091186.

### Champing at the Bit for Improvements: A Review of Equine Welfare in Equestrian Sports in the United Kingdom

Tim Q Holmes<sup>1</sup>, Ashleigh F Brown<sup>2</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 35565612 PMID: [PMC9100173](#) DOI: [10.3390/ani12091186](#)

[Free PMC article](#)

> [Animals \(Basel\)](#). 2021 Nov 12;11(11):3228. doi: 10.3390/ani11113228.

### How Happy Are Equine Athletes? Stakeholder Perceptions of Equine Welfare Issues Associated with Equestrian Sport

Tamzin Furtado<sup>1</sup>, Liane Preshaw<sup>2</sup>, Jo Hockenhill<sup>3</sup>, Jennifer Wathan<sup>4</sup>, Janet Douglas<sup>5</sup>, Sue Horseman<sup>3</sup>, Rebecca Smith<sup>1</sup>, Danica Pollard<sup>6</sup>, Gina Pinchbeck<sup>1</sup>, Jan Rogers<sup>2</sup>, Carol Hall<sup>7, 8</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 34827960 PMID: [PMC8614509](#) DOI: [10.3390/ani11113228](#)

[Free PMC article](#)

#### Abstract

The international governing body for equestrian sports, the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), states that the welfare of the horse must be paramount and never subordinated to competitive or

Open Access Review

### Thoroughbred Racehorse Welfare through the Lens of ‘Social License to Operate—With an Emphasis on a U.S. Perspective

by Camie Heleski<sup>1</sup>, C. Jill Stowe<sup>2</sup>, Julie Fiedler<sup>3</sup>, Michael L. Peterson<sup>4</sup>, Colleen Brady<sup>5</sup>, Carissa Wickens<sup>6</sup> and James N. MacLeod<sup>7</sup>

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  - 7 Department of Veterinary Science, Gluck Equine Research Center, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506, USA
- \* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

*Sustainability* 2020, 12(5), 1706; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051706>

Received: 13 December 2019 / Revised: 14 February 2020 / Accepted: 15 February 2020 / Published: 25 February 2020

(This article belongs to the Special Issue Sustainability in the Equine Industry)

[View Full-Text](#) [Download PDF](#) [Citation Export](#)

#### Abstract

This review addresses the question of whether Thoroughbred horse racing is sustainable in the context of current social values, recently acknowledged framework. Known as ‘Social License to Operate’ (SLO), provides us with a lens through which to view a assess racehorse welfare. In multiple surveys of the general public, the horse owning public, and university students, the primary topics of concern regarding Thoroughbred racing show considerable concordance: concern about catastrophic injuries—particularly as related to track surfaces, concern over the racino of two-year-olds, who use by lockves, druo/medication policies

> [Animals \(Basel\)](#). 2021 Jun 9;11(6):1725. doi: 10.3390/ani11061725.

### An Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Competitive Sport: Theory and Function

Madeleine L H Campbell<sup>1</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 34207809 PMID: [PMC8230307](#) DOI: [10.3390/ani11061725](#)

[Free PMC article](#)

#### Abstract

PREV RESULT: Ethical concern about equestrian sport is reflected in publications by regulatory authorities, 5 of 100 charities, and the lay press; and in government debate and social media. However, attempts by regulators and stakeholders to address ethical issues in equine sport have been discipline specific and

Review > [Animals \(Basel\)](#). 2022 Aug 5;12(15):1987. doi: 10.3390/ani12151987.

### Social Licence to Operate: What Can Equestrian Sports Learn from Other Industries?

Janet Douglas<sup>1</sup>, Roly Owens<sup>1</sup>, Madeleine L H Campbell<sup>2</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 35953977 PMID: [PMC9367437](#) DOI: [10.3390/ani12151987](#)

[Free PMC article](#)

#### Abstract

The concept of ‘social licence to operate’ (SLO) is relevant to all animal-use activities. An SLO is an intangible, implicit agreement between the public and an industry/group. Its existence allows that industry/group to pursue its activities with minimal formalised restrictions because such activities have widespread societal approval. In contrast, the imposition of legal restrictions-or even an outright ban-reflect qualified or lack of public support for an activity. This review discusses current threats to equestrianism’s SLO and suggests actions that those across the equine sector need to take to justify the continuation of the SLO. The most important of these is earning the trust of all stakeholders, including the public. Trust requires transparency of operations, establishment and communication of

> [Animals \(Basel\)](#). 2021 May 10;11(5):1352. doi: 10.3390/ani11051352.

### Symbiosis or Sporting Tool? Competition and the Horse-Rider Relationship in Elite Equestrian Sports

Rachel C Hogg<sup>1</sup>, Gene A Hodgins<sup>1</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 34068606 PMID: [PMC8151029](#) DOI: [10.3390/ani11051352](#)

[Free PMC article](#)

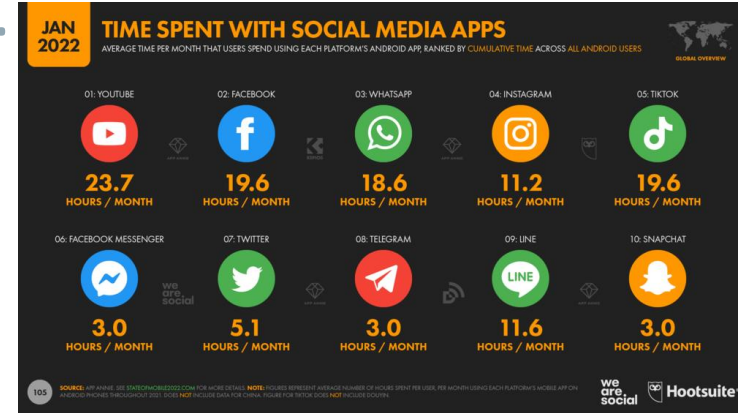
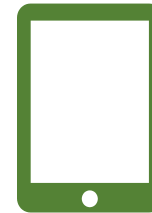
#### Abstract

The horse-rider relationship is fundamental to ethical equestrianism wherein equine health and welfare are prioritized as core dimensions of sporting success. Equestrianism represents a unique and important form of interspecies activity in which relationships are commonly idealized as central to sporting performance but have been largely unexplored in the sport psychology literature. Horse-rider relationships warrant particular consideration in the elite sporting context, given the tension between constructions of “partnership” between horse and rider, and the pragmatic pressures of elite

# Why now? – society engaging more

## Increasing influence of Social Media

Social media communications has changed the world.



April 2021  
Sec. Sport, Leisure, Tourism, and Events  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.669026>

Highlights in Sport, Leisure, Tourism, and Events 2021/22  
[View all 7 Articles >](#)

**5,468** total views

[View Article Impact](#)

SHARE ON

Edited by **Mahfoud Amara**  
College of Education, Qatar University, Qatar

The study analyzes and explains the impact of social media influencers on stable cultures in Sweden and Norway, contributing to the understanding of the complex relationship between

Different forms of Social Media

**Influence can be positive or negative**

### International equine conference considers: Whose opinion matters?

Social media pile ons, the power of opinion and evidence to effect change in the horse world and the need to show compassion when listening to others were just some of the ideas which arose

Posted on 17/11/2021

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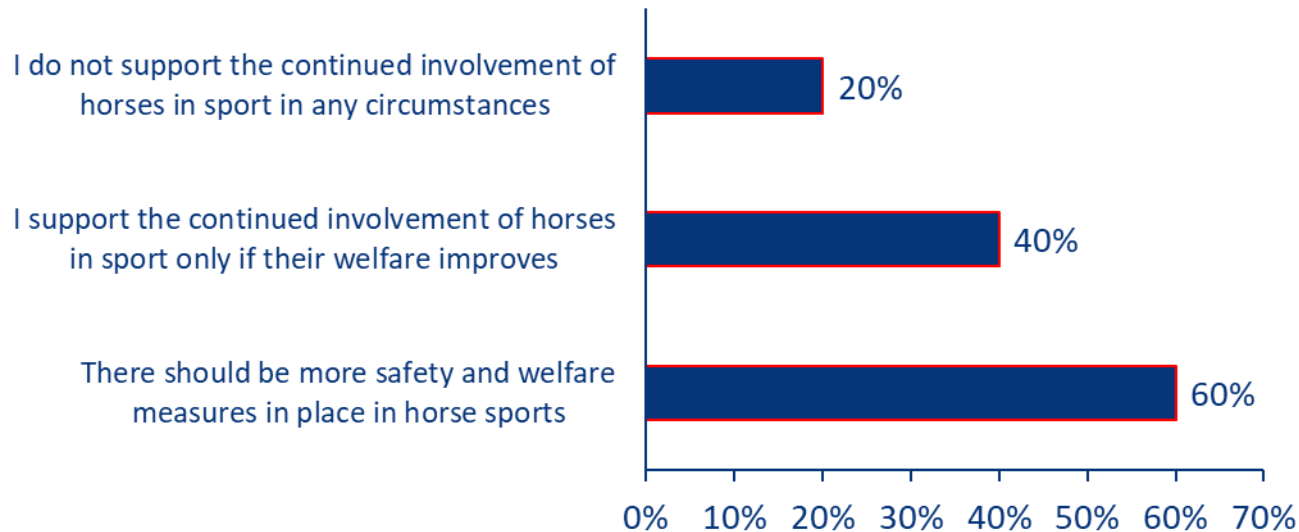
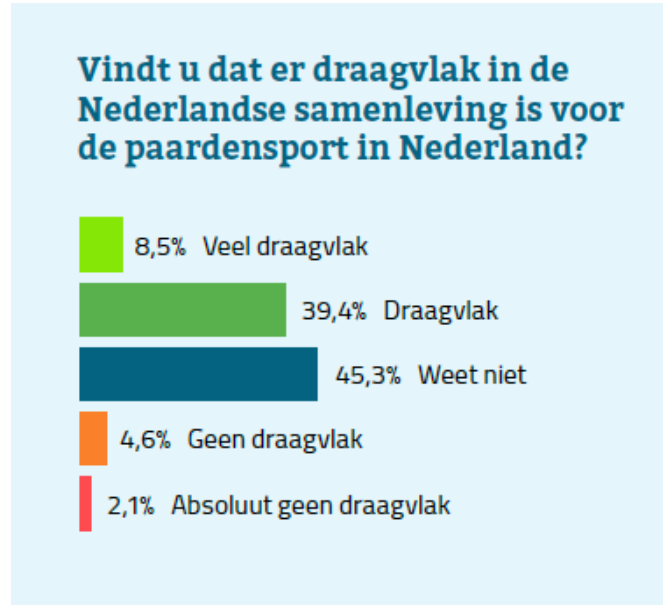
# Why now? Documented rise in public concerns



**Figure 3**  
*51% of the respondents against the use of tack, such as whips and spurs. Only 9% support their use*

**FIGURE 1 - Do you think there is support in Dutch society for equestrian sport in the Netherlands?**

*A lot of support*  
*Some Support*  
*Not sure/don't know*  
*No support*  
*Absolutely no support*



**Figure 2** (World Horse Welfare Survey (YouGov research conducted in UK 20-22 May, 2022))



## What we should realize.

- All equestrian sports increasingly coming under the spotlight
- Society does not distinguish between different equestrian sports
- Society does not recognise a difference between FEI and non-FEI regulated sports
- In some cases the public don't distinguish between species (all animals used in sport or entertainment)
- ***The Public may prioritise emotion over evidence in deciding to grant social license or not.***



# Why is Social License relevant to FEI Stakeholders?

Changing societal attitudes regarding animal use



Increasing public unease about the use of horses in sport



Welfare concerns among equestrians inside and outside the FEI



**Risk to social licence – with negative consequences**

***Bans on national  
hunt racing  
(Australia)***

***Government  
regulation of  
racing (USA)***

***Loss of  
equestrianism in  
Modern  
Pentathlon***

***Interest of the French  
National Assembly in  
equine welfare at the  
upcoming 2024 Paris  
Olympics***

***Regular calls to  
IOC to ban  
equestrian sports  
from Olympics***

# Why did the FEI establish the Commission?

To ensure FEI sports have a strong future

*'Equestrian sport and the FEI's activities are more than ever under public scrutiny and through the Commission we want to embrace that scrutiny to drive change and shine the spotlight on our number one stakeholder – the horse'*

(Ingmar De Vos President FEI).

# The Commission members – ‘Critical Friends’

## External



Nat Waran (Chair)



Kathalijne Visser



Camie Heleski

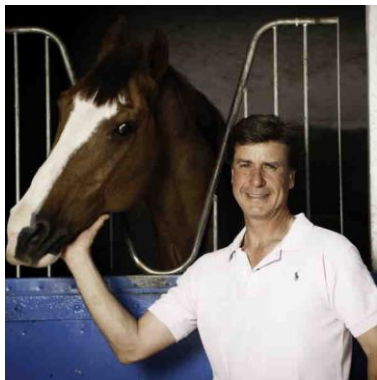


Jessica Stark



Madeleine Campbell

## Internal



Cayetano Martíne de Irujo



Ken Lalo



Theo Ploegmakers



Cesar Hirsch



Sabrina Ibáñez

# The Commission's role

To provide independent objective advice regarding equine ethics and wellbeing to the FEI Board.



Develop a strategic approach to help guide decision making within the FEI in relation to Equine Ethics and Wellbeing.



Provide recommendations to address issues of SLO to the FEI Board for their consideration.



The FEI receives recommendations and advice from the Commission, and decides on the course of action (if any) to address the recommendations.

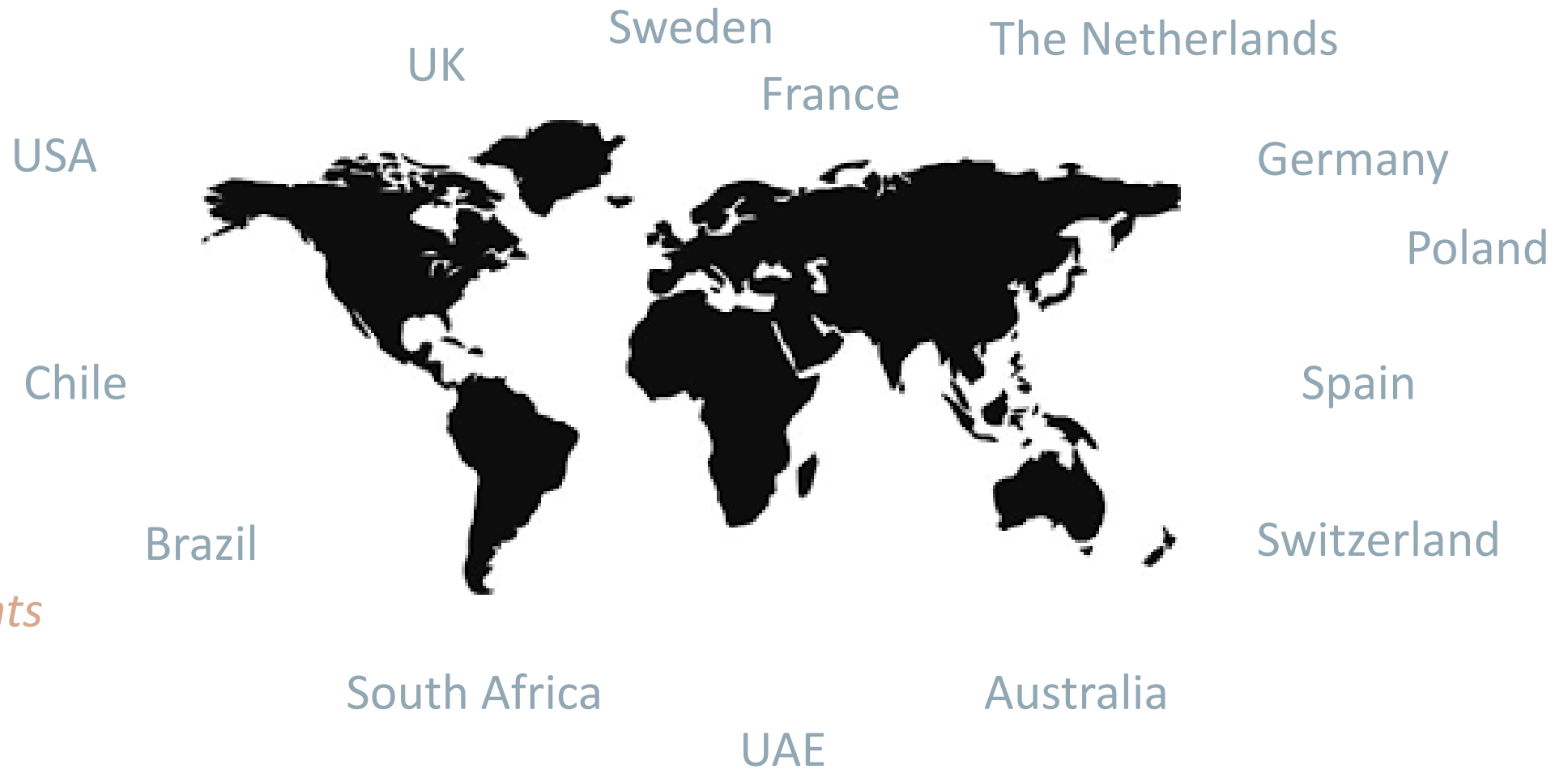
# Social License – What do we know?

Two Surveys to understand the viewpoints of public and equestrians **inside and outside** the FEI

- Survey among Equestrian community (almost 28,000 respondents)
- Survey among Public (over 14,000 respondents)



# Public Survey: The Public respondents – *where do they reside?*

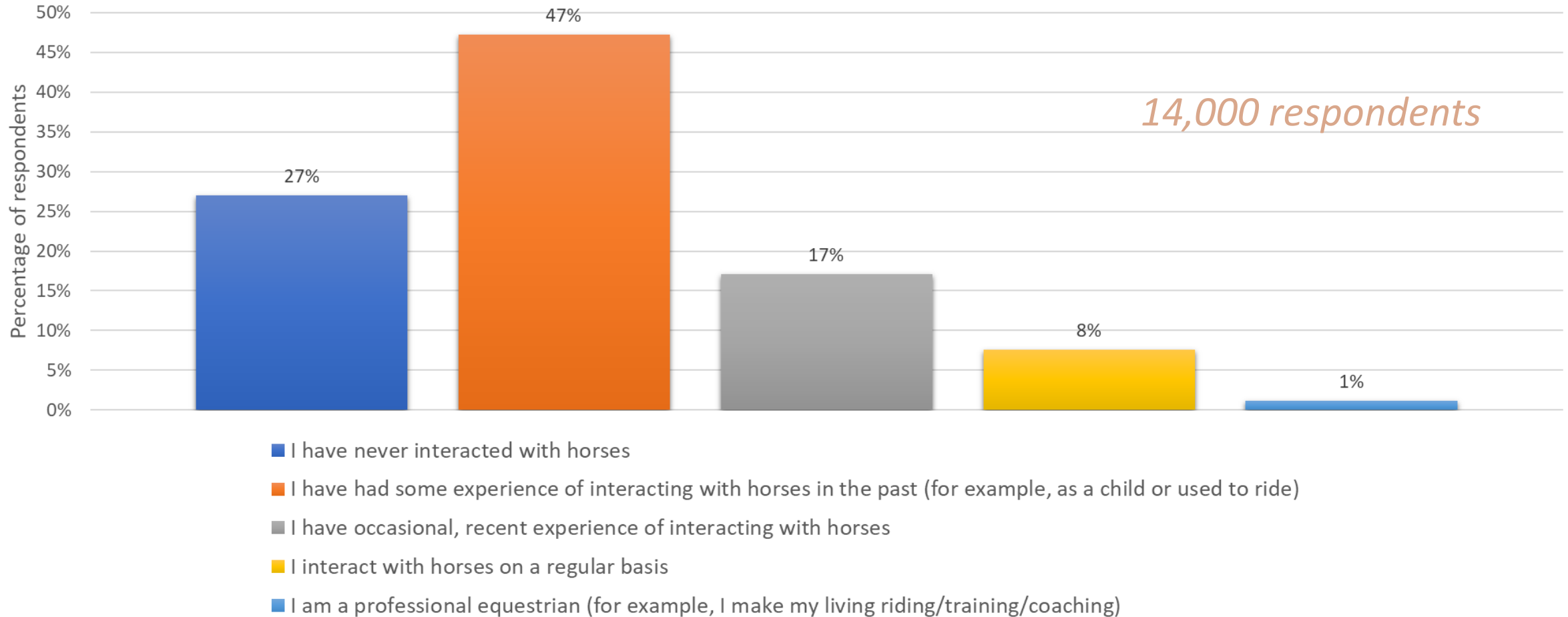


*Respondents  
from 14  
countries*

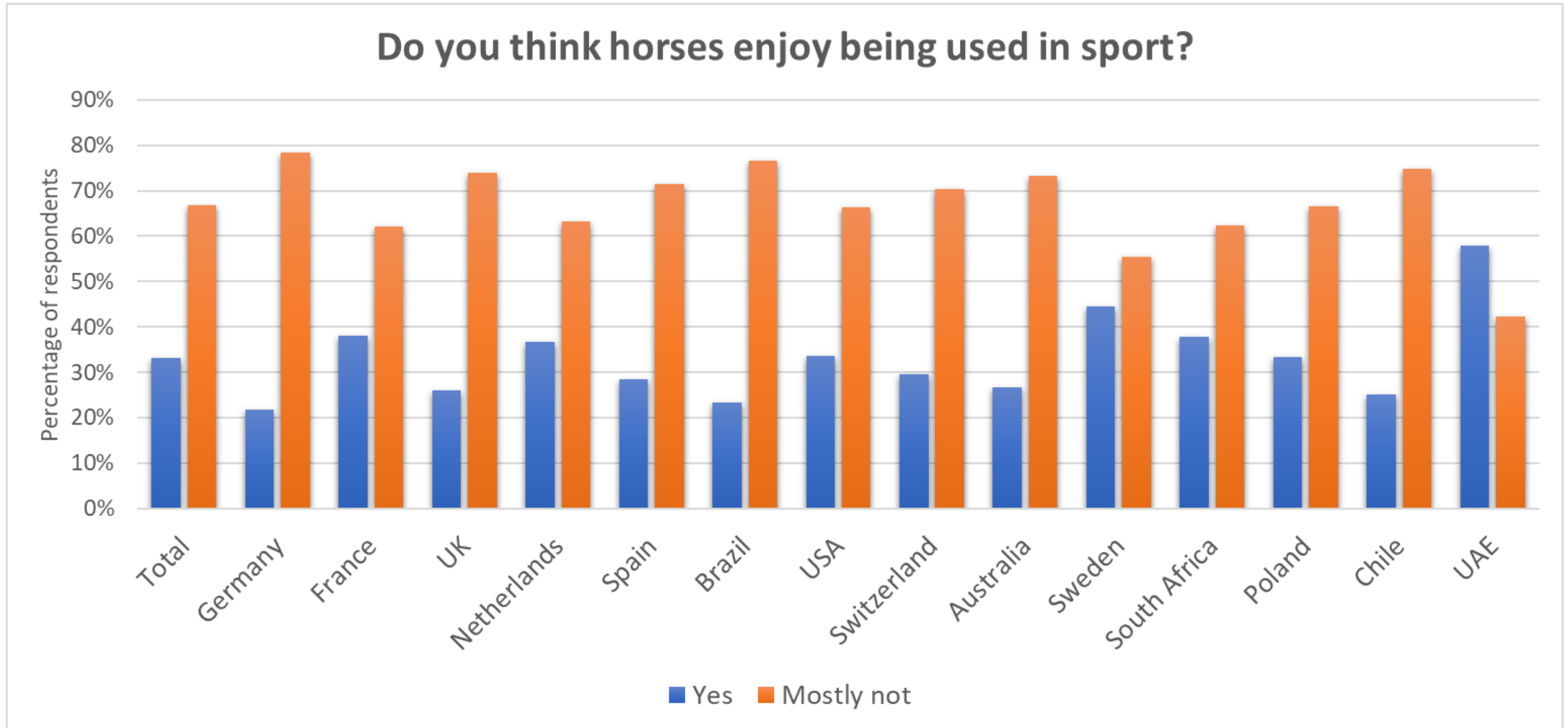


# The public respondents – *who are they?*

**The public respondents' experience with horses**



# Is the Iceberg melting? – public perception

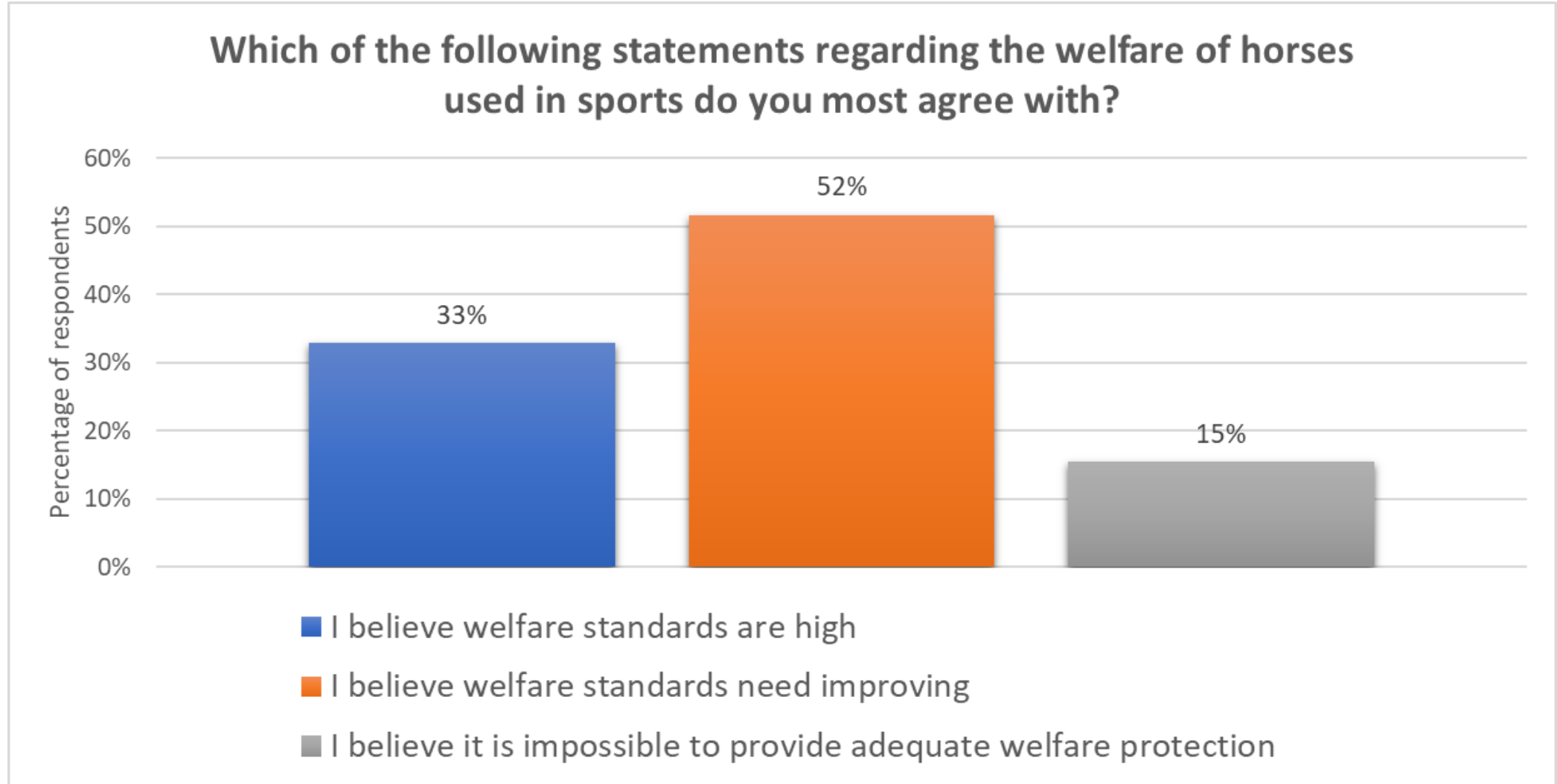


**33%** **67%**



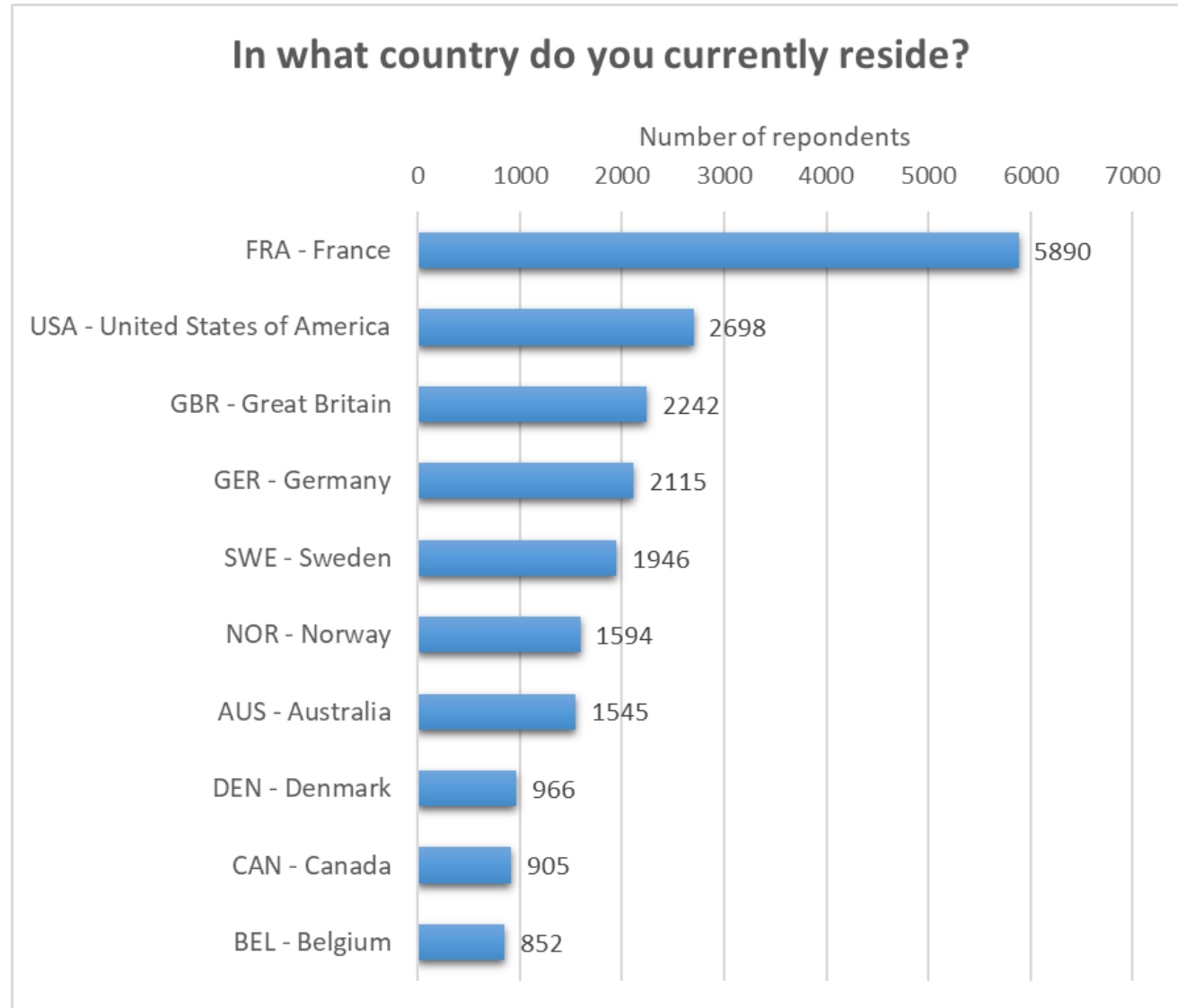


# Public perception – welfare standards



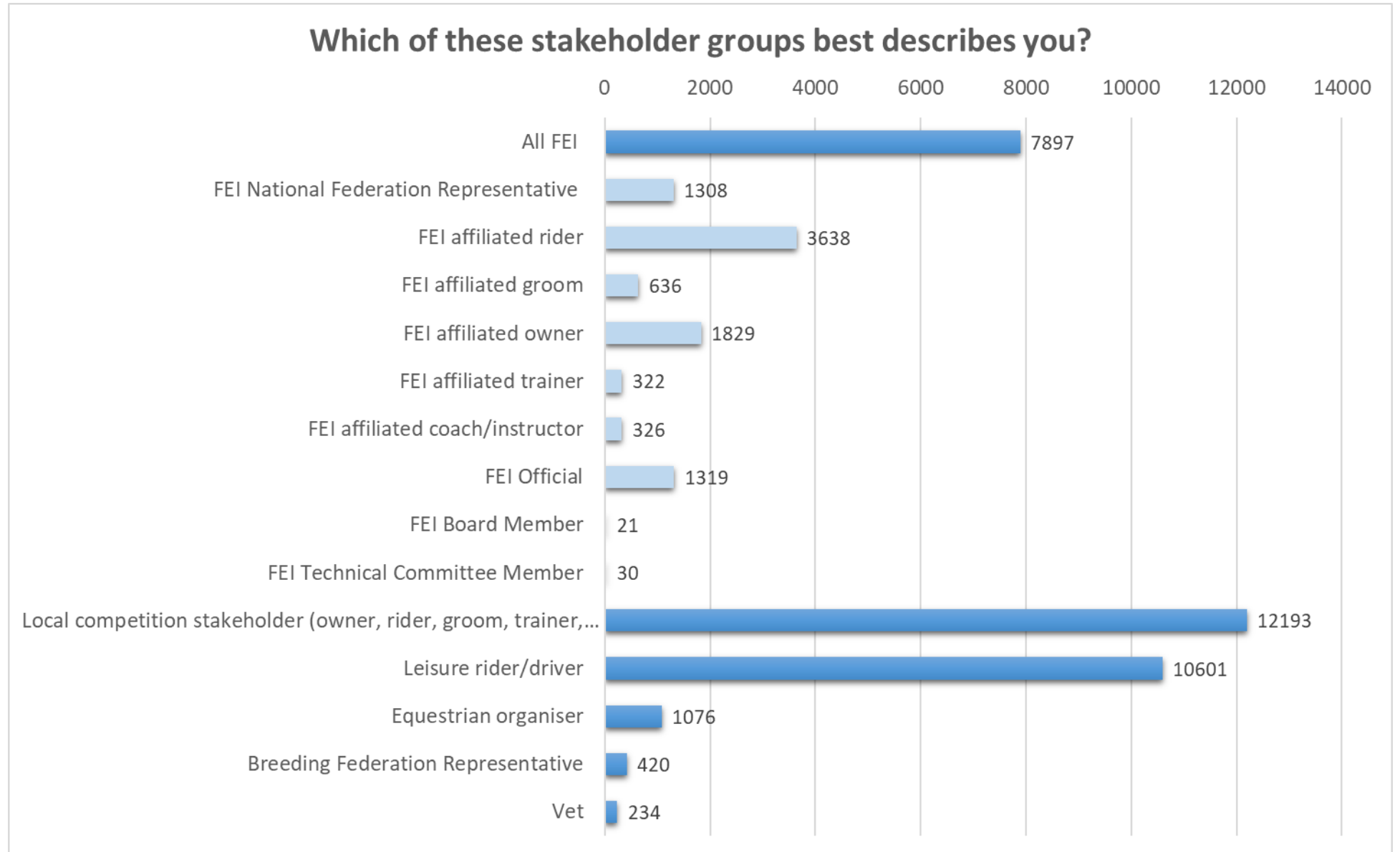
# The Equestrian survey - Respondents *Where* *do they reside?*

*Respondents from  
116 countries*



# The equestrian survey respondents – *who are they?*

27,710  
respondents



# Who are the respondents?

Three 'Stakeholder Groups' within which there are a variety of views



## Equestrian (Internal)

- FEI Board
- National Federations
- Riders
- Trainers
- Officials
- Employees

## Equestrian (External)

- Non FEI Equestrians
- Event and Rider Sponsors
- Event Organisers
- Equine Welfare Organisations
- Veterinarians
- Farriers

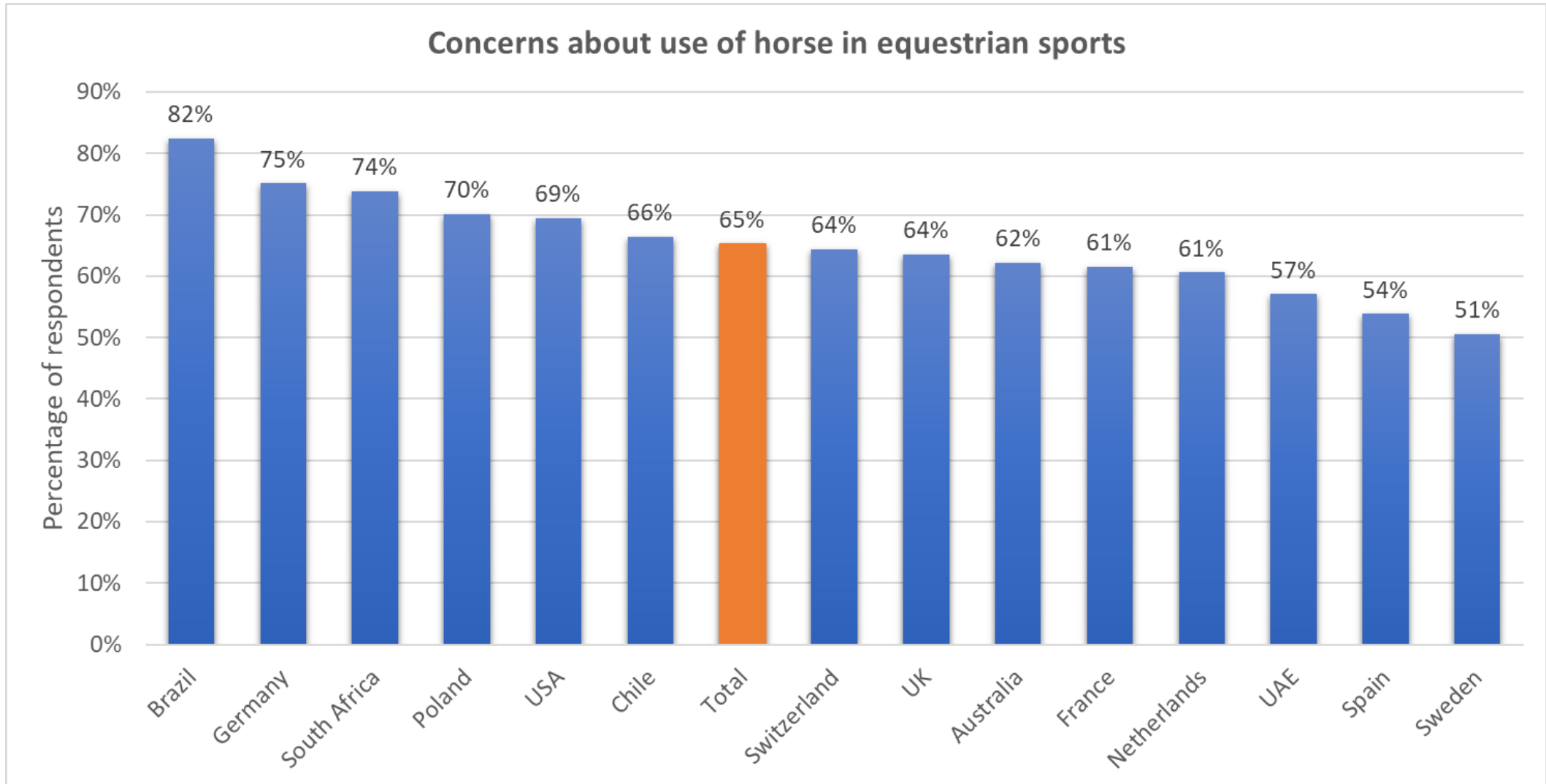
## Non- Equestrian (Public)

- Members of the Public with no investment or history with horses



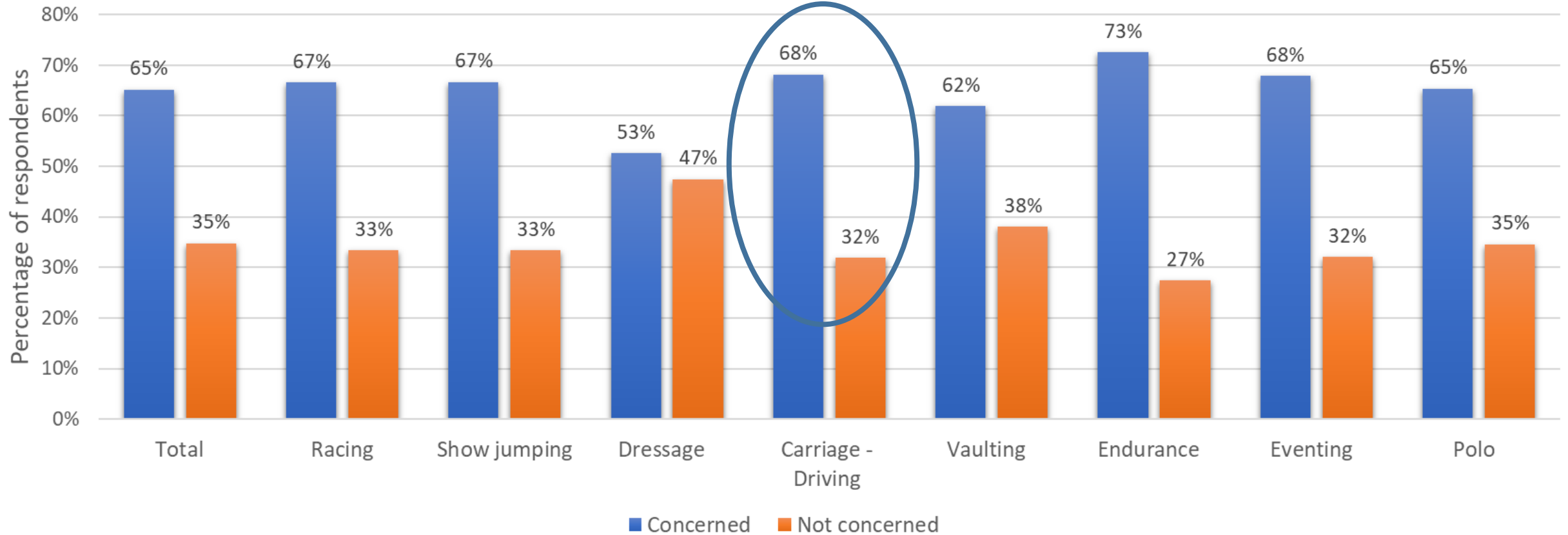
Equestrian Community

# How concerned are the Public?

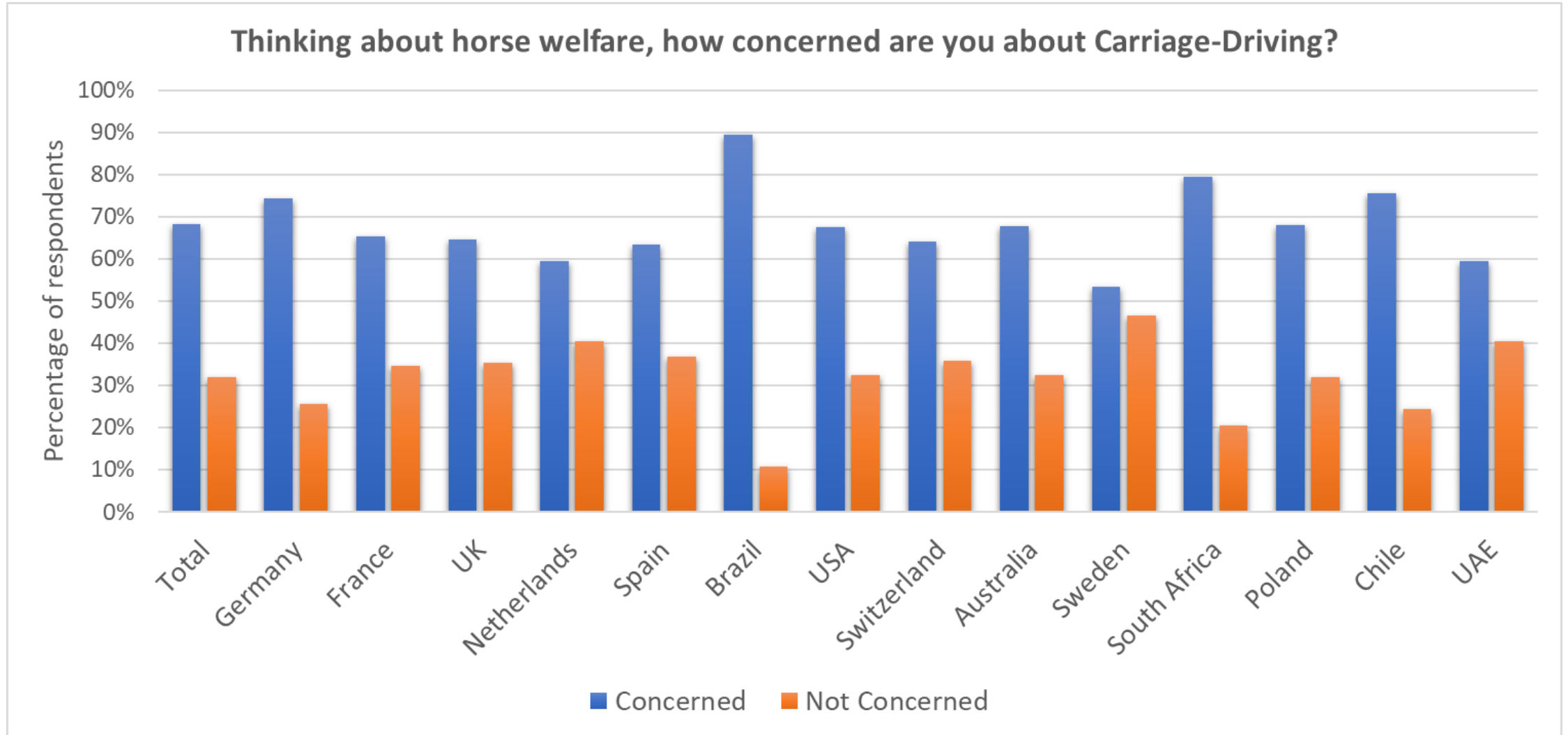


# Public perception: equestrian uses

Concerned about different equestrian uses

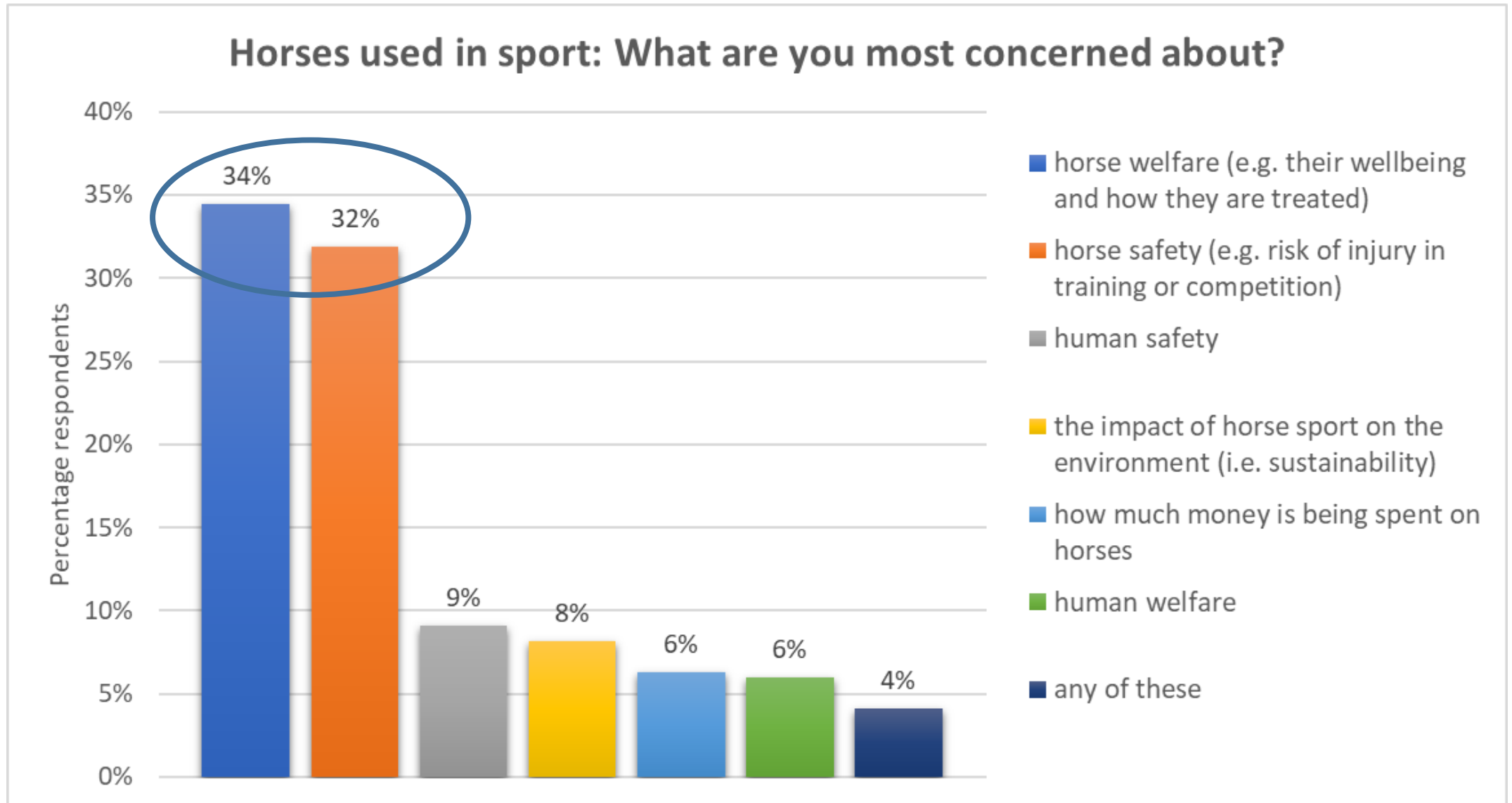


# Public perception: Carriage-Driving



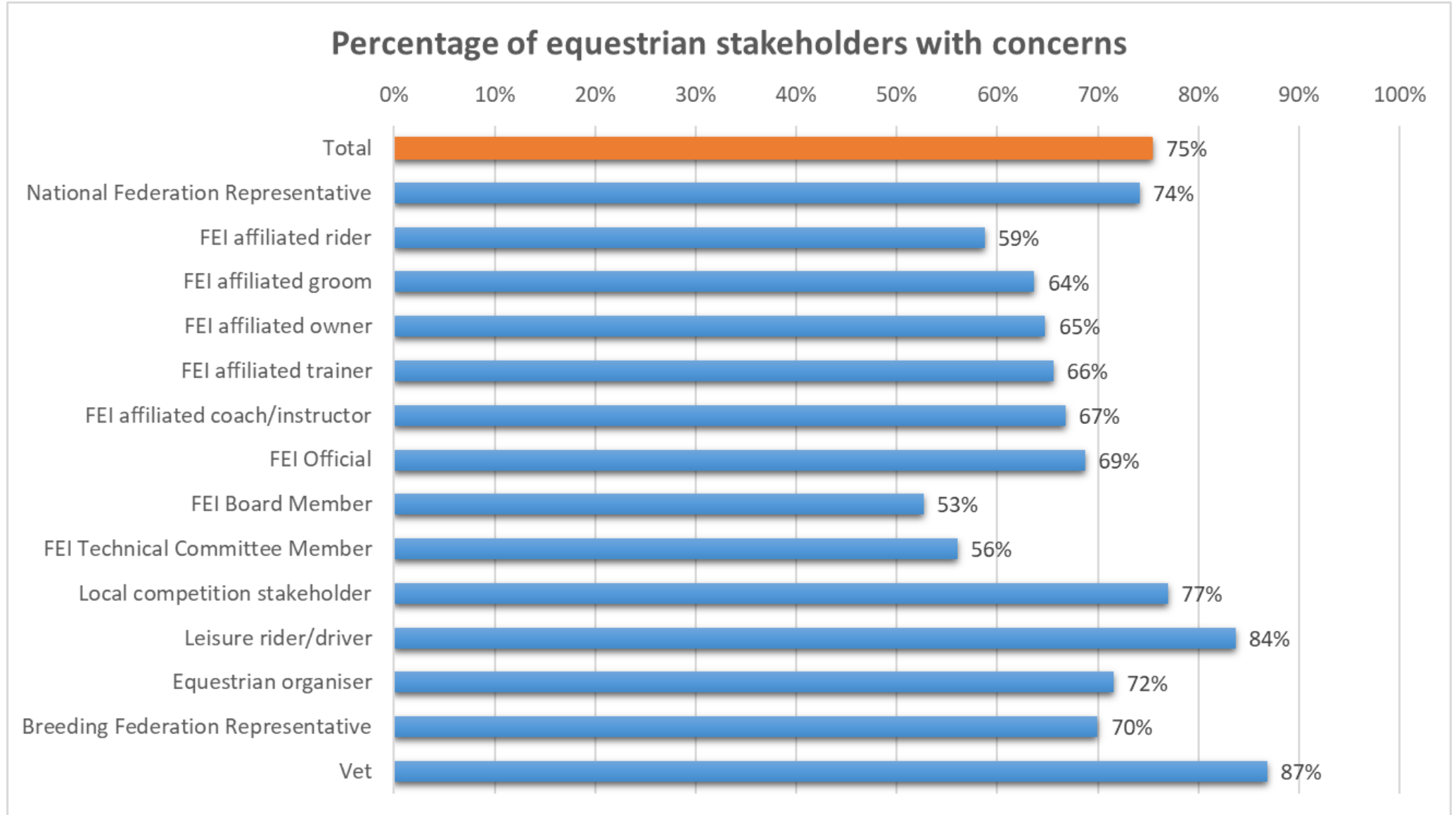
**68%** **32%**

# What were the main Concerns of the public ?

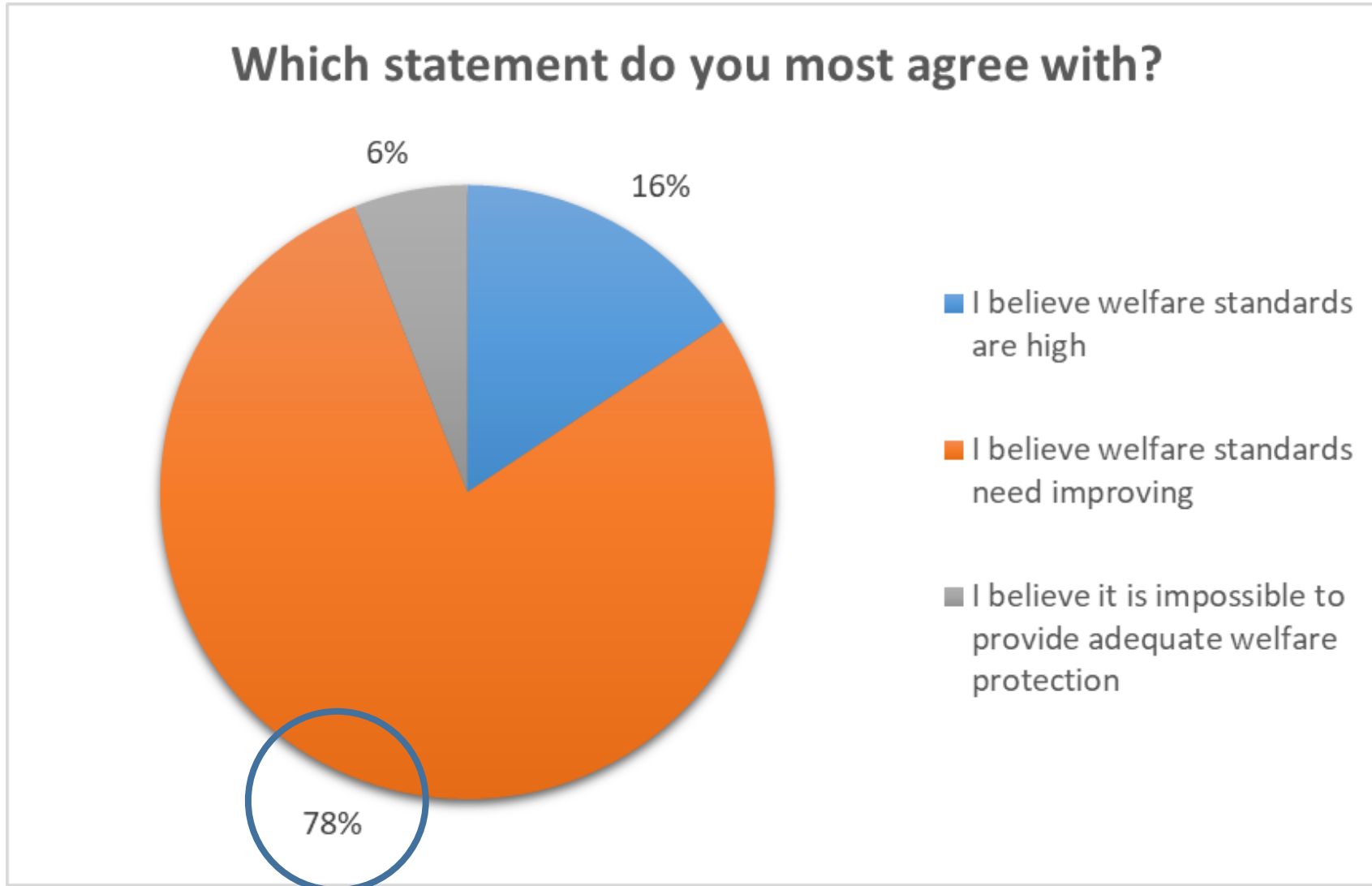




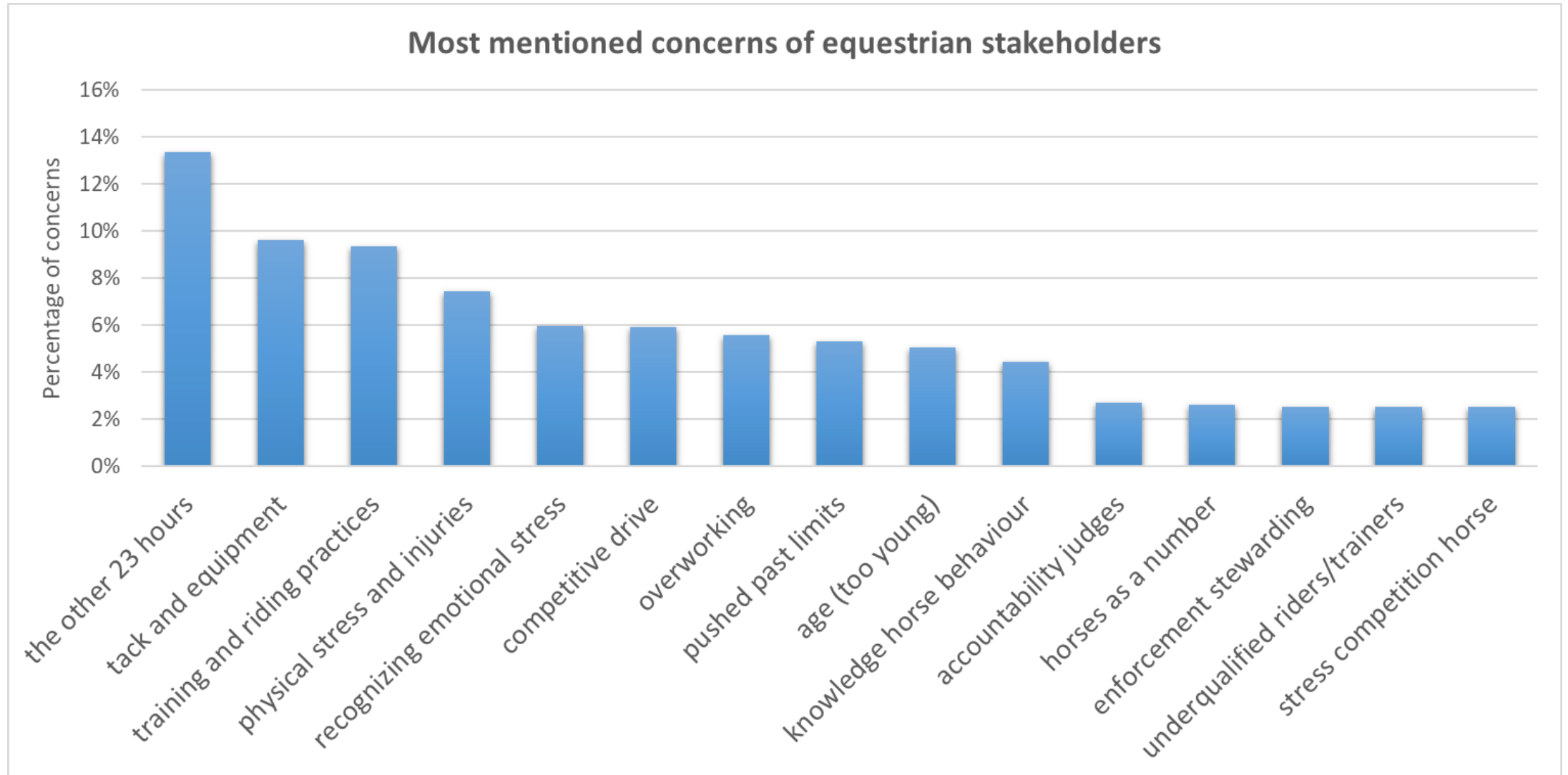
# Equestrians: who is concerned?



# Equestrian stakeholders feel welfare standard need improving.



# What are Equestrian stakeholders concerned about?



# What did you tell us?



# 6 priority areas of focus



# Equine Industry Welfare Strategies

2019 VICTORIAN RACING EQUINE WELFARE STRATEGY

Equine welfare is integral to our industry

## We want your input

As part of our 3 year strategy this is an opportunity for trainers, owners and breeders to share their thoughts and insights regarding welfare issues.




NEW ZEALAND THOROUGHBRED RACING

## Thoroughbred Welfare Assessment Guidelines

October 2019




 **Horse Welfare Board**

### A life well lived

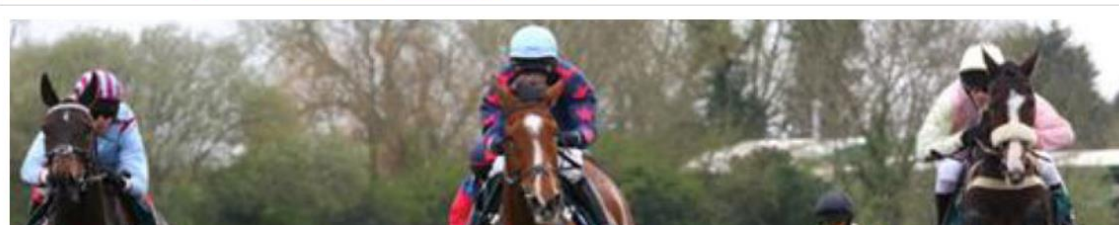
A new strategic plan for the welfare of horses bred for racing, 2020-2024

**Horse Welfare Board**  
February 2020

## Welfare strategy hailed as a pivotal moment for British racing

February 21, 2020 | Horsetalk.co.nz | 2 Comments | OTTB

Share



# Construction of the FEI Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Strategy



Overarching Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Strategy– **How**



‘Road Map’ detailing Objectives, Outcomes and Timelines –  
**What, When and Who**



‘Dashboard’ to measure and monitor progress against deliverables in the Roadmap - **Progress**

# Strategic Objectives

## Positive welfare

To ensure that horses involved in sport can experience positive welfare throughout their working lives

## Guide FEI

To guide FEI regulations, policies and practices and inform wider-reaching advocacy and information



## Social License to Operate

To ensure continued social acceptance of the involvement of horses in sport





GA (South Africa) 2022

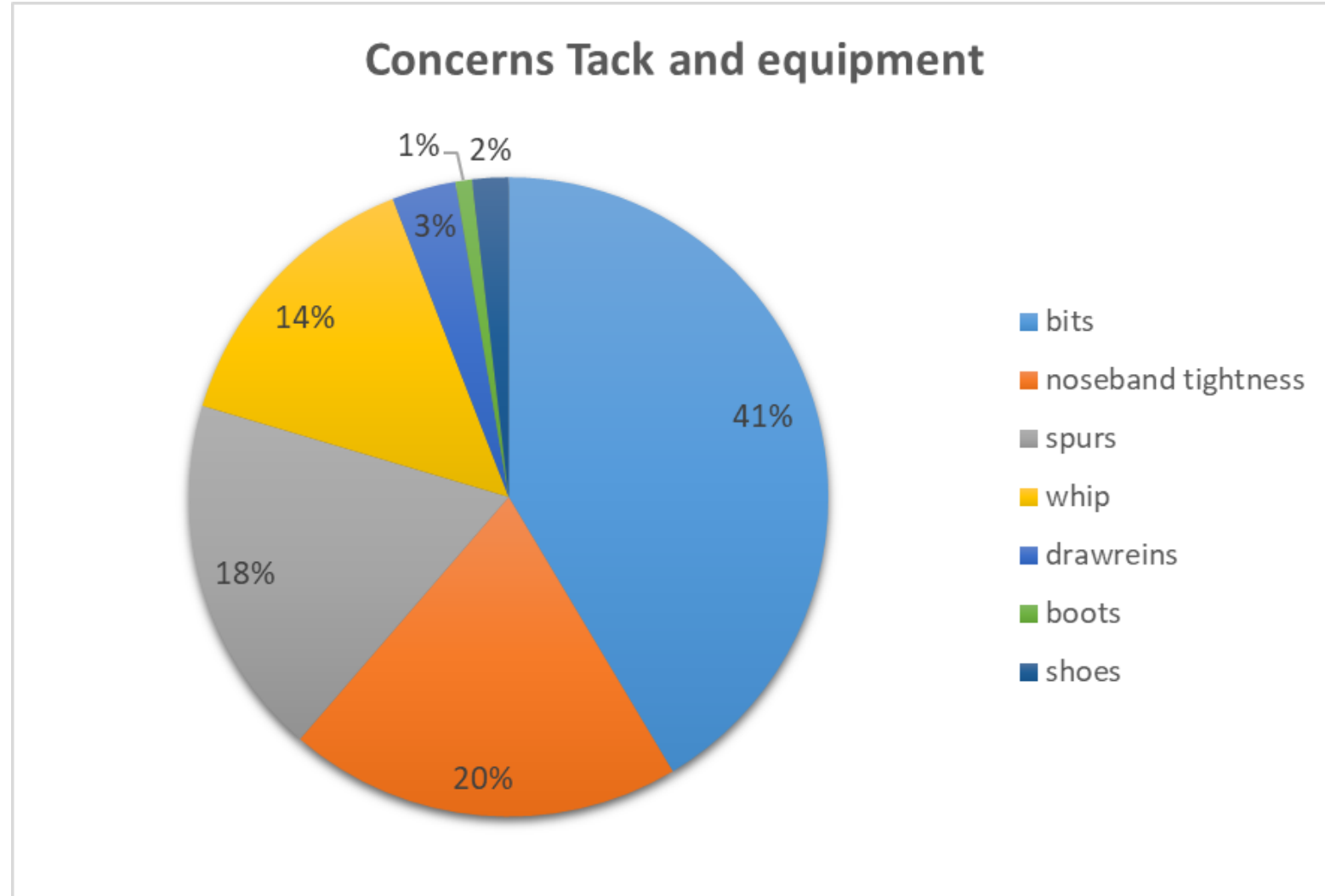
Sports Forum (Lausanne) April 2023

General Assembly (Mexico) 2023

# Basis for Commission Recommendations

- ✓ **Public and Equestrian Survey Results**
- ✓ **External related information** – External reports, information from animal welfare organisations, independent survey results
- ✓ **Research evidence** - Reviewing research publications related to equine wellbeing and ethics. Identifying gaps in knowledge, making recommendations for where research is needed.
- ✓ **Consultation with Equine Stakeholder and Equine welfare experts (FEI and non-FEI)** –consultation regarding specific concerns and potential solutions with different groups involved with equine welfare and use of horse in sport
- ✓ **EEWB Advisory/Working Groups** –Scientific Advisory Grp, Education Working Grp, Legal Working Grp, Communication Working Grp.

# Method example: gather SLO information from surveys



# Use of Research Evidence

**EQUINE ETHICS & WELLBEING COMMISSION**

EQUINE ETHICS AND WELLBEING COMMISSION

Further supporting information related to Tack and Equipment Early Recommendations 2022

*Review of relevant research (August – November 2022)*



**EQUINE ETHICS AND WELLBEING COMMISSION**

**Recommendation 1**

**Tack and Equipment – Double Bridles**

Double bridles should not be mandatory and should be made optional in FEI Grand Prix Dressage. Currently the use of double bridles is mandated by FEI regulations for dressage when horse and rider achieve a specific level of competition (FEI, 2022). The Commission recommends that double bridles should not be mandatory at any level of dressage, and the regulations changed so that use is optional for riders competing at Grand Prix level.

**1. Supporting information**

- Although bits can be extremely effective and especially when used with great care, bits and especially more severe bits are a risk in that they can cause extensive damage to the tongue, bar and hard palate of a horse's mouth (Cook 1999, Mellor 2021)
- It is already the case that double bridles are optional for riders competing under a number of National Federation regulations at Grand Prix level.
- Use of more severe bits designed with stronger deceleration pressures used in conjunction with accelerator devices such as spurs are a welfare risk (Hill et al., 2015; Condon et al., 2022)
  - Increased chance for misuse through overshadowing of "go" and "stop" responses (Condon et al., 2022)
  - Increased conflict behaviours (Condon et al., 2022)
  - The use of a double biting system for the horse has the potential to interfere with coherence of the cues/aids (Cross et al., 2017)
  - Repeated mouth opening (used as an indicator of discomfort or pain) was seen in more than 50% of horses competing in Grand Prix level Dressage (Oyson et al 2021)
  - Double bridle noseband design most commonly involves crank nosebands, which have been linked to additional welfare concerns due to the ease in which they can be overtightened (McGreavy et al., 2017)
  - Double bits including lever action increase the risk of a horse experiencing pain/fear and conflict. Addition of a curb bit which makes use of levers that amplify rein tension, with the shank

**2. Research Publications**

1. Björnsdóttir S, Frey R, Kristjansson T, Lundström T. Bit-related lesions in Icelandic competition horses. *Acta Vet Scand.* 2014 Aug 13;56(1):40. doi: 10.1186/s13028-014-0040-8. PMID: 25116656; PMCID: PMC4236600.

An independent Commission established by the FEI



2. Christensen J., Beckmans M., Van Dalum M., Van Dierendonck M. Effects of hyperflexion on acute stress response in ridden dressage horses. *Physiol. Behav.* 2014;128:39–45.
3. Condon, V. M., McGreevy, P. D., McLean, A. N., Williams, J. M., & Randle, H. (2022). Associations between commonly used apparatus and conflict behaviors reported in the ridden horse in Australia. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 49, 1-14.
4. Cook, W.R. (1999). Pathophysiology of bit control in the horse. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, 19, 196-204.
5. Cross, G. H., Cheung, M. K., Honey, T. J., Pau, M. K., & Senior, K. J. (2017). Application of a dual force sensor system to characterize the intrinsic operation of horse bridles and bits. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, 48, 129-135.

**Report from the Science Advisory/Working Group Expert Group Discussion/Forum**

**Subject:** Bits, Bit use and Mouth pain/damage

**Group name:** Nordic College of Equine Dentistry facilitated by Dr Orla Doherty

**Date of Meeting:** Online meeting with—4/5 November 2022  
Commission members present: Kathalijne, Madeline and Nat

**Summary of meeting:**

Facilitated by Dr Orla Doherty, and equine veterinarian with a special interest in equitation science and equine welfare – the meeting took place via Zoom, with 4 equine veterinarians and one surgeon.

**Main points are as follows:**

1. There is not a lot of space in the horse's mouth
2. It is impossible to have a bit in the mouth and have no pressure
3. The mouth has many sensitive areas

Equine Veterinary  
1(5):1187  
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# Other Early Recommendations

**Horsemanship Courses**  
Available to FEI Officials at all times, recommended to them frequently



FEI Campus E-learning Platform

FEI

## Tack and Equipment – 3 recommendations

- **Double bridles** should not be mandatory
- **Spurs** should not be mandatory
- **Nosebands** should not be tight – A uniform method of measurement including an agreed definition of ‘too tight’, should be used based on the available science.

## Regulation – 1 recommendation

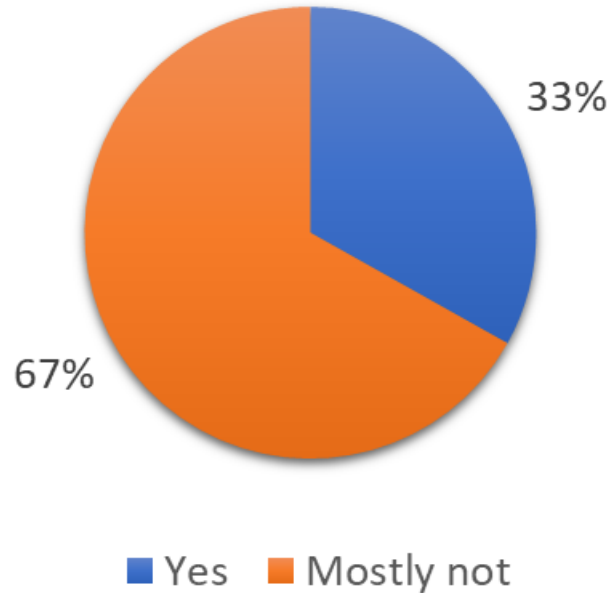
- Include in the FEI General Regulations a rule to apply consistently to all Disciplines to allow elimination on horse welfare grounds

## Others – 2 recommendations

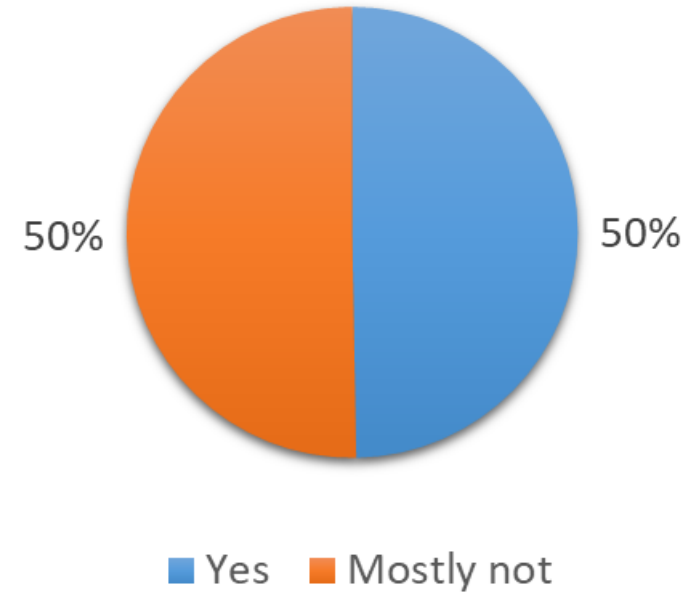
- Establish an Education Focus Group to review existing modules in FEI Campus and propose new ones
- Establish a Research Fund to address gaps in current knowledge regarding Equine Welfare

# Changes are needed

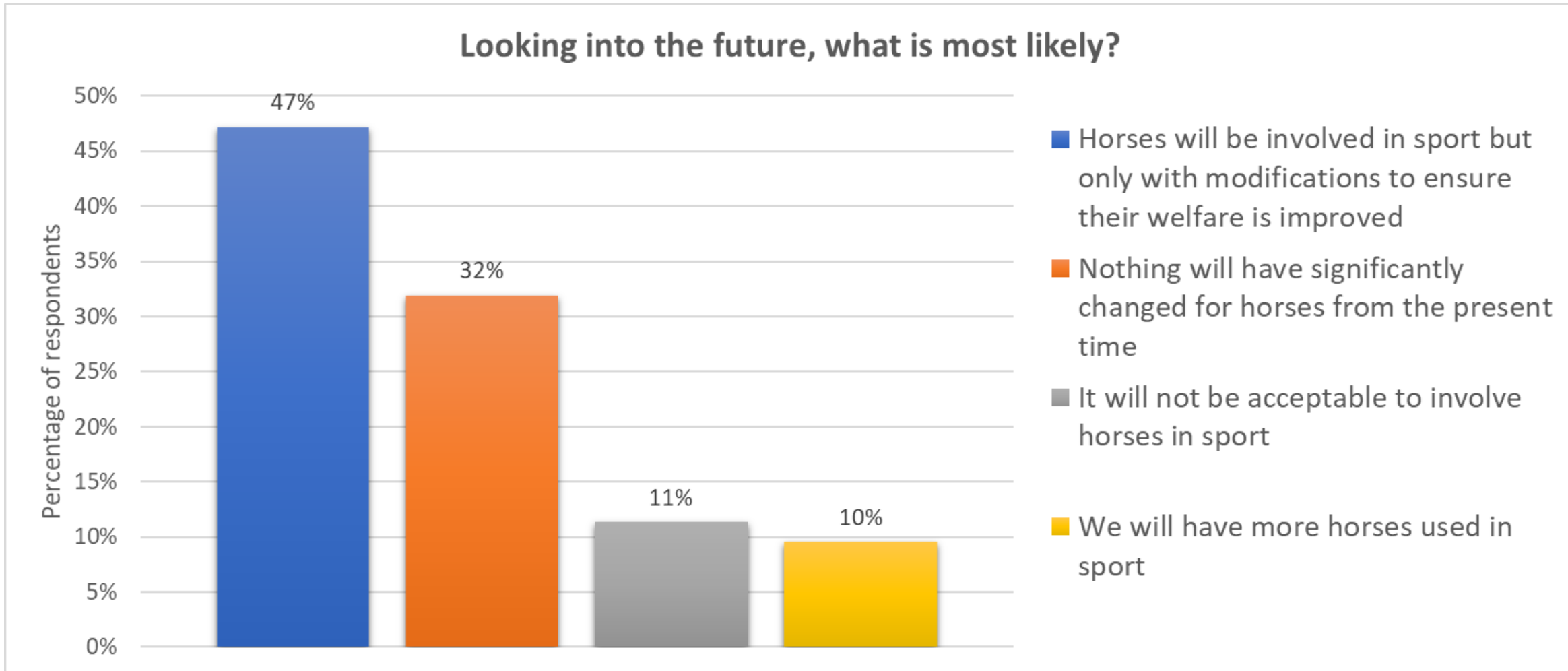
**Public: Do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport?**



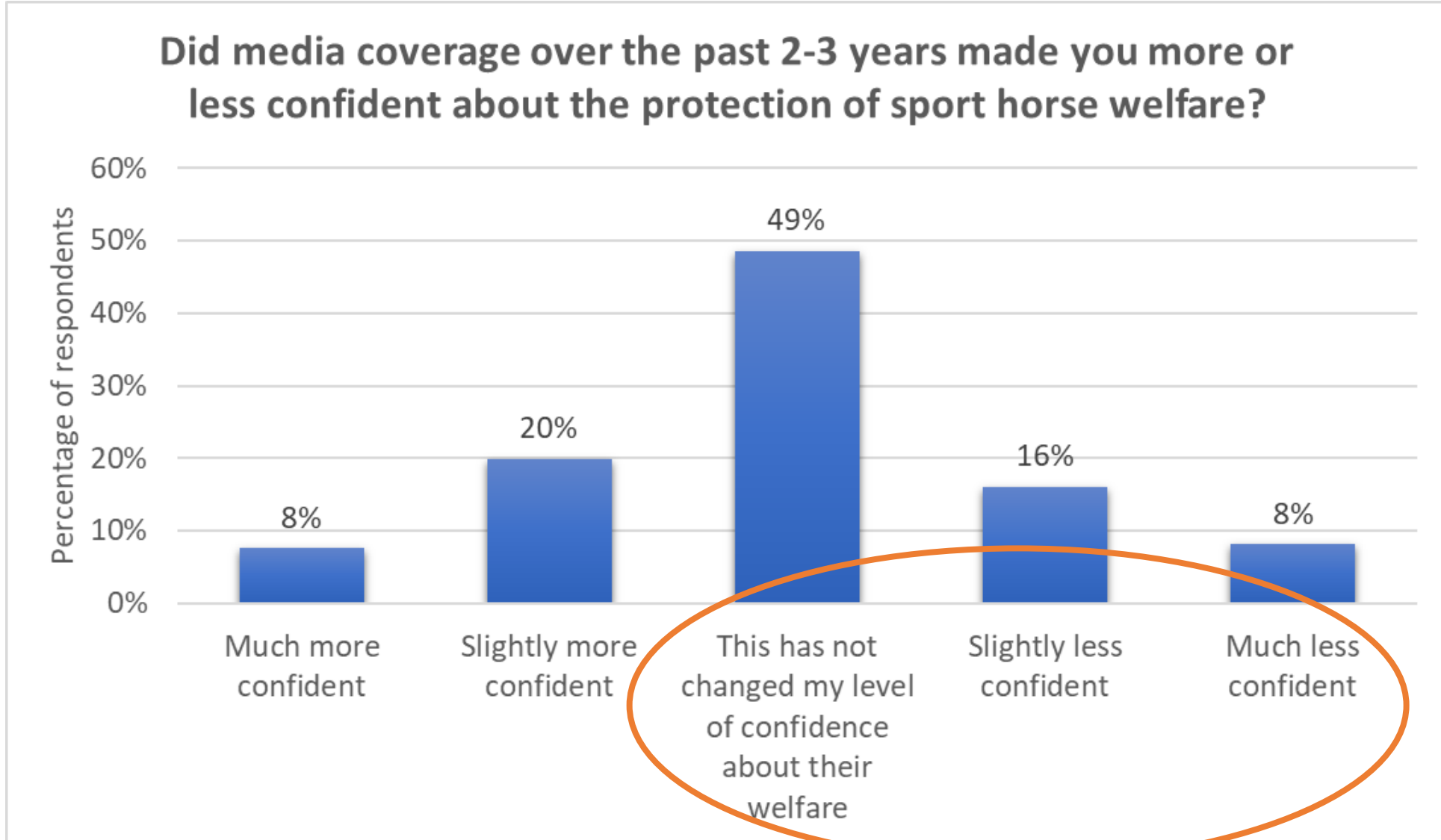
**Equestrians: Do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport?**



# How do the public feel about the future of the involvement of horses in sport?

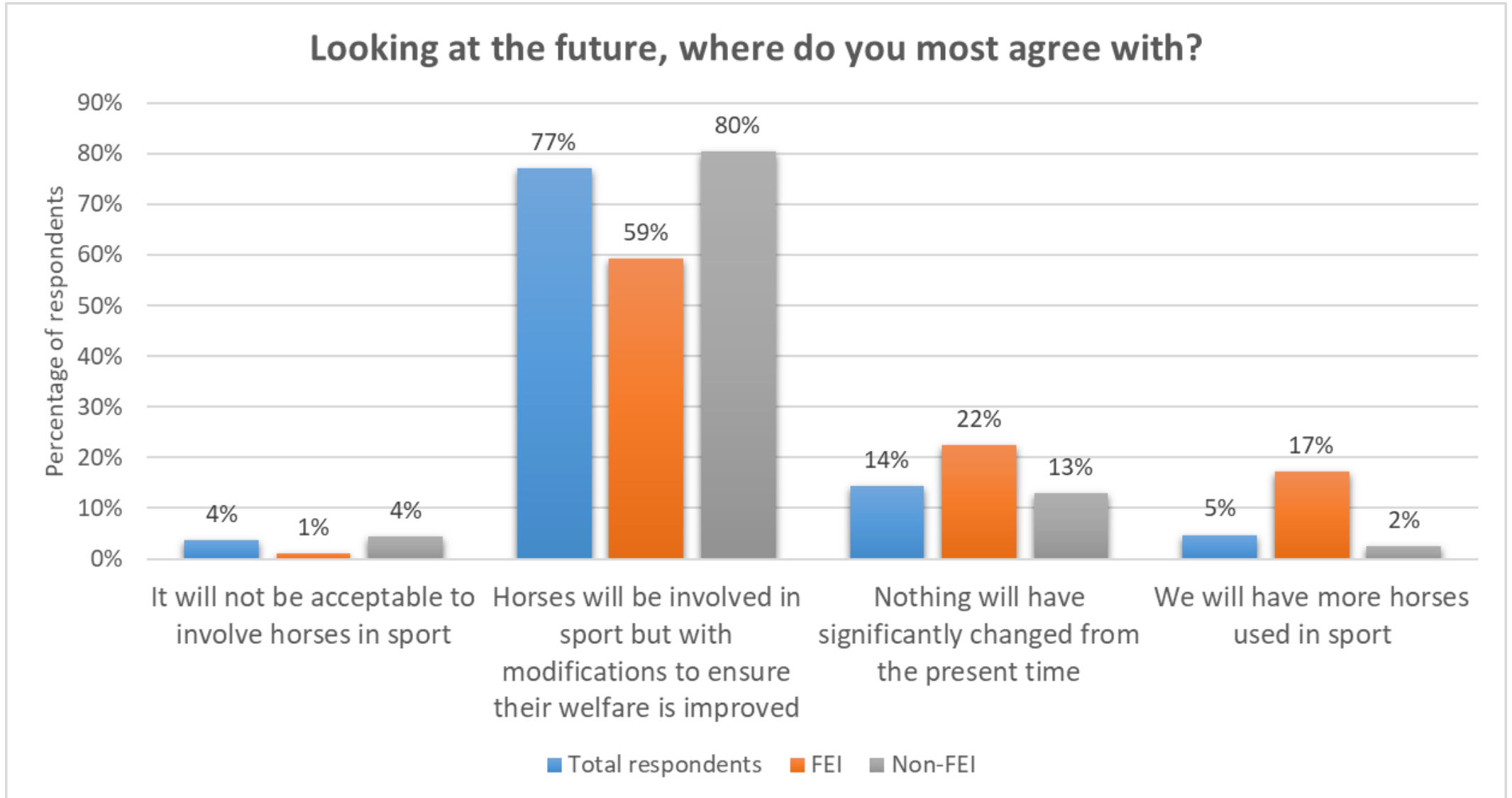


# Impact of media coverage on Public

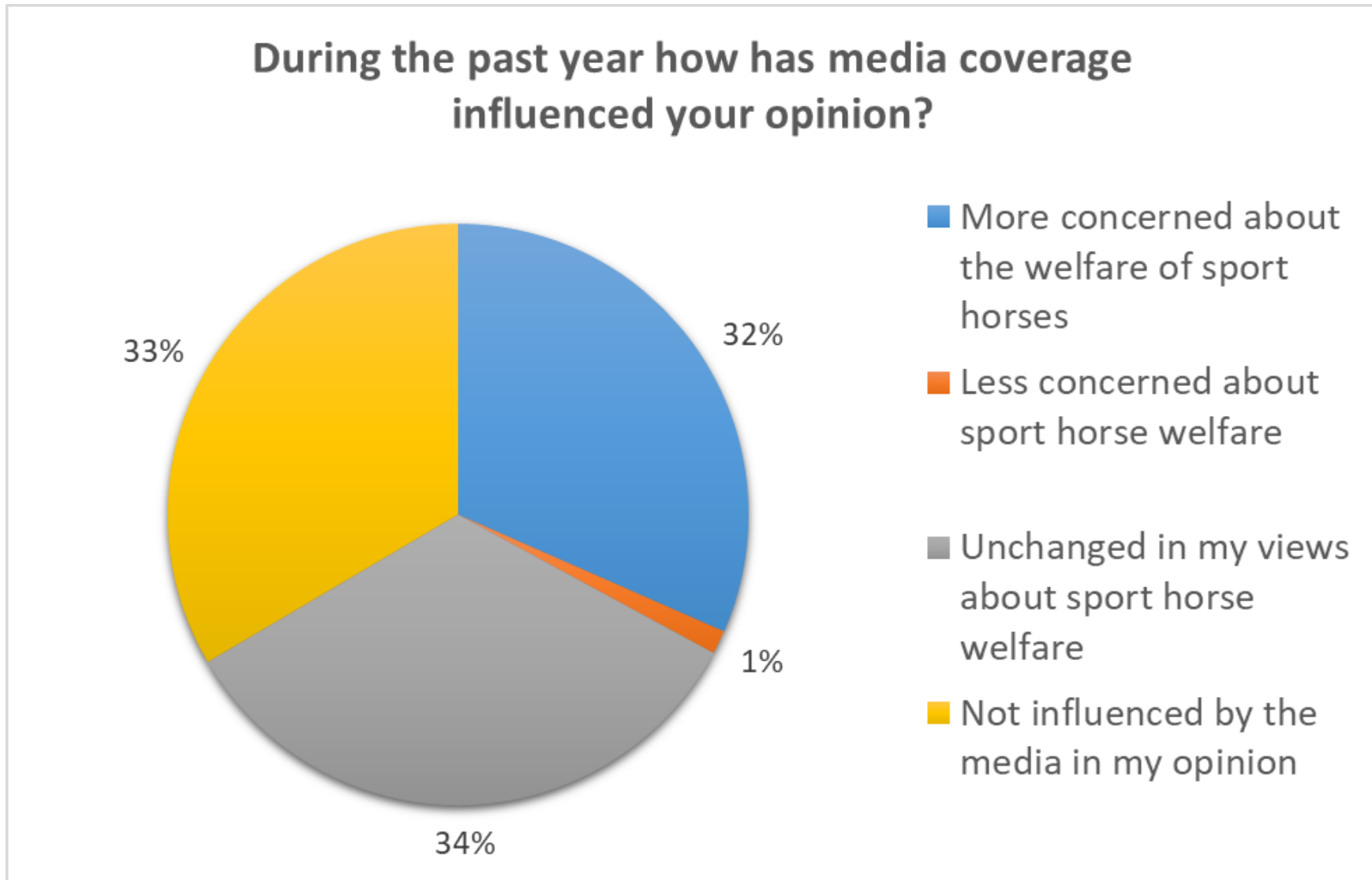




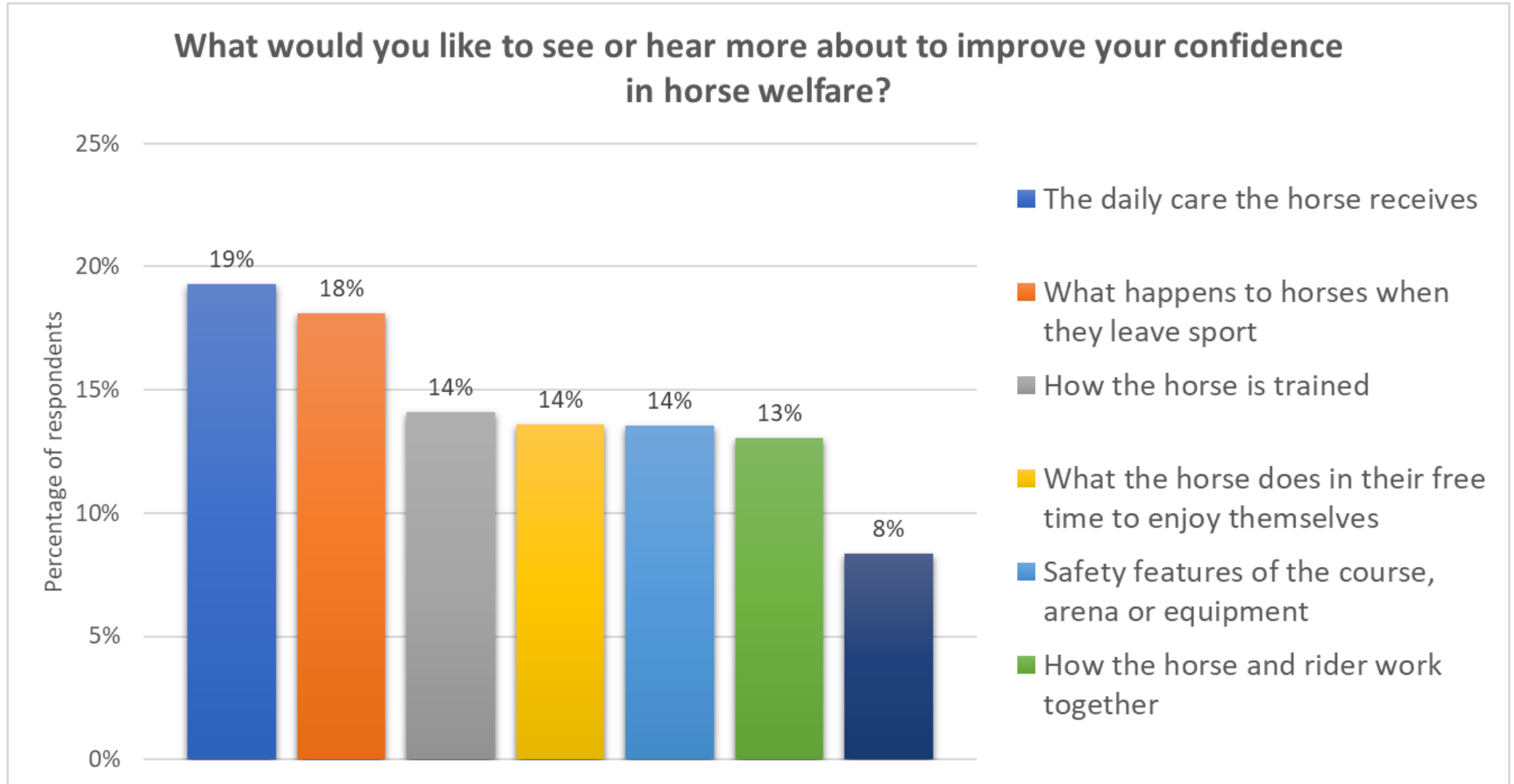
# What about the Equestrian stakeholders?



# Impact of media coverage on Equestrians



# What can help improve Social License? - Public





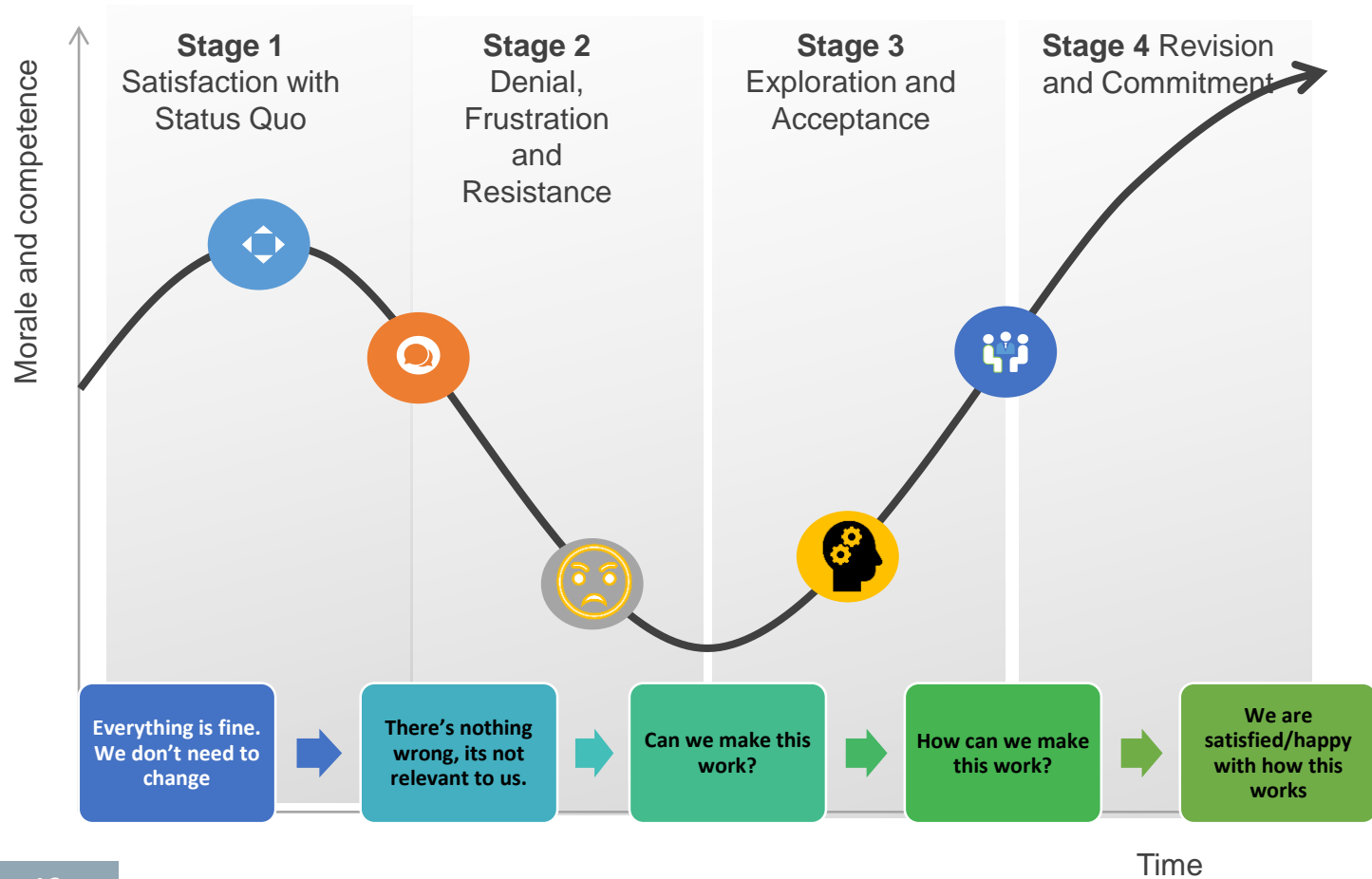
# A Different Lens: Within Equestrians – is there a difference?



# A Different Lens: Within Equestrians – is there a difference?

	FEI affiliated respondents	Non FEI affiliated respondents
Tack and equipment, Riding and Training Practices		
Recognizing physical and emotional stress		
Accountability, enforcement, knowledge		
The other 23 hours		
Competitive drive, horse as a number		
Not fit to compete, masking health problems		

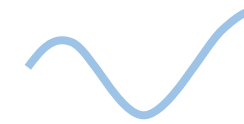
# What does this mean?



**Adoption and Integration**

Ownership

Ethics and Wellbeing Commission



Gather Relevant SLO Information

Communicate to support **Understanding**

Recommend Direction of Change

Provide Support and Advice

Monitor and Review Progress

Everyone involved in equestrian sports needs to:

*Not only optimise  
and prioritise  
equine welfare  
because it is the  
'right thing to do',  
but also **to be  
seen to be doing  
so.***

***Understand their  
responsibility** –  
and the impact of  
their actions/words  
and use of images*

*Ensure that they  
**actively engage  
with and address  
concerns** related  
to Social Licence*

# More information - Commission Website



[Home](#) [Members](#) [Meetings](#) [Key Documents](#) [Contact Us](#)

Public Attitudes on the Use of  
Horses in Sport: Survey Report  
(November 2022)



**Equine Ethics and  
Wellbeing Commission**



Opinions of Equestrian  
Stakeholders on the use of Horses  
in Sport: Survey Report  
(November 2022)

What is the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission?

[equinewellbeing.fei.org](http://equinewellbeing.fei.org)





# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to **all** who have generously provided us with support and help in carrying out the Commission's work.

# Questions for the Equestrian Driving community

1. What are the main areas of risk for your discipline in terms of SLO?
2. What do you feel are issues that might negatively impact horse wellbeing in your discipline?
3. What do you want to do within your discipline to help to maintain SLO for the whole equestrian sport?



Thank you